

Exploring Character Development in the Novel

Name: _____

Date: _____

As in the short story, **character** is probably the most important element in the novel. Novels are first and foremost about people—and readers care most about interesting and well-developed characters.

CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

The length of the novel allows the novelist to use characters in many more ways than in the short story.

A greater number of main characters The author can develop a whole range of interesting central characters. Often the author contrasts the conflicts faced by each major character so that readers will see them in light of each other. (Compare the different struggles faced by Huckleberry Finn and his raft-mate, the ex-slave Jim, on their adventures down the Mississippi.)

Use of minor characters The author may also use the experience of minor characters as a “foil” to contrast with the experience of major characters. (Think about the relationship between Cervantes’ famous characters: Sancho Panza, the practical servant, and Don Quixote, his idealistic master.)

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN THE NOVEL

The length of the novel also allows for more detailed character development than the short story.

Novels allow for richer characterization. The novelist can present the novel’s characters in a greater variety of situations and allow readers to understand more fully the forces that have shaped their attitudes and actions. (Think about how we come to know Holden Caulfield by following him through a variety of experiences detailed in J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*.)

Characters have time to develop in the novel. They have time to develop deeper relationships with other characters. There is also time to face—and overcome—a variety of problems and obstacles. Because characters in the novel have the opportunity to engage in so many experiences, they have the opportunity to really change and grow from the beginning of the novel to the end.

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHILE YOU ARE READING A NOVEL:

1. Who are the major characters in the novel? What is the central conflict that each one faces? Does the novelist suggest parallels or contrasts between the major characters, or between the major and minor characters?
2. How do the major characters develop over the course of the novel? How does the novelist use the extended length of the novel to enrich the characterization of these characters? How do the characters change from the beginning of the novel to the end?